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Doctoral School Education, Reflection, Development

**The Effect of an Intervention Program on Students'
Satisfaction from Administrative Service Quality in Higher
Education in Israel**

PhD Thesis – Long Abstract

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Abstract

On the grounds of global changes worldwide, the education system, and higher education institutions within it, are required for conceptual and organizational changes, in order to empower the marketing of their institution, and the consequent perception of students as customers, the need for higher education institutions to ensure delivery of quality services have become crucial, and the necessity for the practice of applicable management methodologies has increased.

The current research focuses on the quality of administrative service in the Kibbutzim college of Education in Israel. The research examines the administrative service components using a service quality questionnaire and expending via interviews with students and secretaries. In an attempt to improve the quality of service provided to students, an administrative service contract has been developed and implemented, aiming to advance the skills of the faculties' secretaries, and hence to improve students' satisfaction. Further examination attempted to examine the correlation between students' satisfaction and students' perceptions of their academic achievements.

Pre intervention findings indicated a fairly high satisfaction of students in the five variables examined: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, with significant differences between the examined groups: B.Ed, M.Ed, and Teaching certificate students, and differences according to gender, age, and of secretaries' group.

Post intervention findings exposed a significant increase in students' satisfaction in three variables related to service delivery: responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Findings were reinforced by the categories that emerged from the interviews, in relation to staff availability, personal attitude and feelings of trust. Medium-strong correlations were found between students' satisfaction and their perceived academic achievements. The main conclusion that emerges from the findings is that students' satisfaction is mainly related to aspects of transparency of the services provided, and to interpersonal aspects that instill a sense of trust and comfort.

In accordance with the findings, and with the factual and conceptual conclusions, the original SQUAD-HEI model was designed, in order to improve the administrative service in higher education institutions. The SQUAD-HEI model is offered to managers and policy makers in higher education institutions in Israel and worldwide.

Introduction

For centuries, universities have contributed to Western culture, being the originator and protector of creative and innovative thinking, and taking the responsibility for the development of civilization. As a result, universities have had a crucial and beneficial influence in serving national needs and in expanding nations' economic and social success. Hence, the formation of modern higher education institutions was shaped in accordance with the social, political, economic and technologic evolutions that took place in each nation.

Following economic and political revolutionary changes that have taken place in recent decades, and the transition to free market rules and cost-benefit relations, higher education institutions around the world are now heavily facing the need for structural and conceptual changes.

As a result of these modifications, students studying in higher education institutions increasingly see themselves as customers of higher education, and consequently, have an increasing volume of expectations and demands.

In light of these changes, the awareness of higher education institutions to students' expectations, and to the provision of quality service has intensified.

In an attempt to address the new situation, higher education institutions distinguish between two types of service providers: the academic staff, who is responsible for equipping the students with the theoretical and practical knowledge, and the administrative staff, who is the address for students in every aspect relating to the inspection of academic and ethical requirements, verifying the obligations for the degree, and for a variety of matters that arise during the course of their studies.

Given the amount of services provided by the administration, it is highly important for the administrative staff to be capable of providing quality service and to effectively relate and assist students with their needs and requests.

Higher education in Israel encounters similar concerns in relation to the recent alterations in this arena: a growth in the number of private colleges and a decline in government budgeting, along with a growing awareness of students regarding their expectations and requirements. Consequently, higher education institutions in Israel, and the Kibbutzim College within them, are required to undertake conceptual and

practical changes regarding the quality of service provided to the student, the preservation of institutional reputation, and future marketing moves of the institution.

As the head of administration of the faculty of education at the College, and as I hold extensive experience and a broad perspective as a manager, I conclude that the quality of service provided by the administrative staff, and within them the service skills of secretaries, is of unique significance. Moreover, the quality of service has a crucial influence on students' overall satisfaction, and therefore forms an important part in the organizational equation.

During doctoral writing, I came to an understanding that my personal and professional views, in combination with my managerial philosophies, correspond with the humanistic agendas of education and of educational institutions, and agree with the vision and values of Kibbutzim College. This understanding led me to generalize all parts of the equation to an integral value and visionary complex, and led the research from theory to practice.

The current research wishes to shed light on the significance of the administrative service on students' satisfaction. It further attempts to expose the perceptual gaps between students and administrative staff, and highlights the main areas to be addressed. The implementation of an administrative service contract is a mean by which service quality improvement, and consequent enhancement of students' satisfaction, may lead to an improvement of their academic achievements.

In sum, the issue of service quality has been of great importance recently, and the results of this research are therefore expected to be of great significance in assisting and directing decision makers in the formation of an agreed service policy.

Research Aims

1. To explore how the implementation of an intervention program, aimed at developing an administrative service contract, will cultivate secretaries' skills in providing quality service.
2. To expose the difference in perceptions between students and administrative staff, pre- and post-intervention, in relation to the quality of administrative service.

3. To examine students' perceptions regarding the relationship between their satisfaction from the administrative service and their academic achievements.

Research Questions

1. How will the implementation of an intervention program, aimed at developing an administrative service contract, cultivate secretaries' skills in providing quality service, in relation to tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy?

2. What is the difference in perceptions between students and administrative staff, pre- and post-intervention, in relation to the quality of service provided by the administrative staff?

3. What are the students' perceptions regarding the relationship between their satisfaction from the administrative service and their academic achievements?

Research Boundaries

The research took place at Kibbutzim College of Education in Israel, and included a sample of 500 students and 22 academic secretaries. The research employed a mixed-methods approach. Data analysis methods included content analysis and statistics. Data was collected during 2018-2019.

Thesis Structure

The thesis includes six chapters: the first three chapters discuss organizational theories and theories of educational leadership, aspects related to higher education institutions, and service quality features. The fourth chapter defines the methodological choices of the research. The fifth chapter presents the findings of the study, including discussion of the findings. The last chapter summarizes the factual and conceptual conclusions and offers recommendations for future research.

Significance of this Research

Throughout my examination of the topic, the literature review has not raised similar research, which focuses exclusively on administrative service and on an intervention program in the specific field of knowledge. Therefore, the contribution of this research should be of great significance and of considerable interest to students, administrators, academics and policy makers in higher education institutions.

Chapter I: Theoretical Background

I.1.Theories of Management and Leadership in the Educational Organization

The main goal of the liberal democratic educational system is to educate for autonomy: to develop the ability to independently observe and criticize values, wishes, beliefs, and obligations (Dahan, 2018). According to Levinson (1999), school is the main arena where children can develop the abilities that will lead to autonomy, by integrating exposure to various worldviews, moral views, and religious concepts, alongside traditional disciplines. Hence, the accountability of the educational system is largely dependent on its management approach and educational leadership.

Transformational leadership is one of the most prominent of the current approaches to leadership. Transformational leadership is informed by the ability to form positive interpersonal relationships as characterized by the ability to motivate, build trust, and consider the needs of others (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978).

According to Kirby, Paradise, and King (1992), who examined transformational leadership in education, transformational behaviors of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation are related to follower satisfaction and perceptions of effectiveness. Marsh et al. (2014) further claim that the ability of the educational leader to build relationships based on honesty, trust and respect, is seen as central in maximizing influence on their team (Marsh et al., 2014).

Trivellas & Dargenidou, (2009) suggest that the ability of institutions to provide an overall climate and culture for change is based on factors such as trust and long-term commitment, employee empowerment, and participation in decision-making, and via human resource practices, which will encompass an improvement of administration quality.

Servant leadership is an additional leadership approach, increasingly influential and highly suitable for the management of educational institutions. A main objective of servant leadership in education is to learn to listen in order to build trust in other people, to create a sense of belonging, and to nurture the well-being of the organization (Greenleaf, 1977).

I.1.1. Present Management of Higher Education Institutions

In light of global changes worldwide, the education system, and educational institutions in particular, are becoming more of an autonomic organization.

In the turn to higher education for the masses, and the transformation of higher education into a commercial organization, institutions have started to adopt marketable management methodologies, and characteristics of the delivery of service quality became a matter of concern (Lagrosen, Seyyed-Hashemi, & Leitner, 2004).

Other environmental forces mediated in the process, including the high expectations of students and their claim for increased flexibility in service provision (Becket & Brookes, 2006).

As the customer is central to the assessment of quality, there has been a shift in control in the determination of quality, and the new role acquired by the university's staff, bases staff members as facilitators rather than providers of the educational service (Dibb & Simkin 2010). As a result of the new educational setting, a range of quality management models, which were developed for industry, have been adopted by higher education institutions (Becket & Brooks, 2008).

The SERVQUAL instrument and the gap model were originated by Parasuraman et al. (1985), in an attempt to be attentive to customers' expectations, and hence, to control the required managerial moves. The gap model involves comparing what is required by the marketplace and the levels of performance the operation is currently achieving. The gap model has been used extensively in the service management literature and can be used as well in assessing the quality of higher education.

1.1.2. Kibbutzim College Managerial Mission Statement

The dominant forces of capitalism and commercialization, aim to devour humanistic and moral foundation and to lessen the educational connection into a provider and customer relationship, and abandon the definition of education as a human connection.

Thus, the caring fields, including the educational arenas, need nowadays to embrace and develop a broader and deeper educational approach, one that nurtures humanistic values and purposes. Noddings (2002) reinforce this attitude. In the ethics of care, Noddings refers to moral development, based on humans' capability to a worrying and caring reaction to the needs of others.

On this theoretical ground, the Kibbutzim College of Education's desire is to create educational hubs where teachers, researchers, administrators and students will develop their human potential for caring and empathy, to cultivate their awareness of the self and others, and to educate caring professionals, who are committed to humanistic values and equipped to confront the globalized and multicultural reality.



Figure I.1 *Formal vision of Kibbutzim College of Education (Kibbutzim College of Education, 2019-2020).*

I.2. The Expectancy Disconfirmation Model of Satisfaction

The theoretical model of customers' perceptions, the expectancy disconfirmation model of satisfaction (Oliver, 1980) proposes that when making satisfaction judgments, customers compare product performance to their expectations or their normative standards. A state of positive disconfirmation is experienced when performance exceeds one's expectations. Over time, incidents of satisfaction lead to perceptions of good service quality.

The customer disconfirmation paradigm has four constructs: (1) Expectations, which reflect anticipated service performance, (2) performance, which serves as a standard of comparison, (3) disconfirmation, which defines the inconsistency between expectations and actual performance, and (4) satisfaction, which is the outcome of the purchase and of a service plus the consumer's comparison of the rewards and the costs.

In attempts to attain high degrees of satisfaction, in harmony with the theoretical basis, special emphasis should be placed on minimizing the gaps between a customer's expectations and the actual service delivered. Further, careful attention should be paid to the different perspectives from which service is being observed, analyzed, and handled.

I.3. Historical Background of Higher Education

The historical evolution of educational institutions begins in ancient Egypt and goes through ancient Greece, the Roman and Islamic empires, the rise of universities in Western Europe during the Middle Ages and up to the first modern university in Germany, at the beginning of the 19th century (Volanski, 2005).

The modern characteristic of higher education, as the initiator and protector of creative and innovative thinking, constitutes teaching and research integration and academic freedom as the cornerstones for the development of civilization (Volanski, 2005).

The formation of higher education as a system, at the beginning of the 20th century, was shaped in accordance to social, cultural, political, economic and technologic evolutions. Unprecedented reforms that occurred during the second half of the 20th century worldwide have turned higher education systems from selective to open, and have unlocked the gates of higher education to a broad population.

I.3.1. Higher Education in Israel

The higher education system in Israel is fairly young, beginning in 1925, with the establishment of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the increase in population led to the founding of five new universities during the 1950s and 1960s. Along with this expansion, in order to protect the academic freedom, Israel instituted the Council for Higher Education (CHE) which functions as an independent statutory body as the sole body responsible for authorizing higher education institutions to award degrees. During the 1990s, due to growth in the numbers of high-school graduates, there was an additional stage of development and diversification in the higher education system, which made possible the opening of a variety of academic colleges (Yogev, 2007).

Like other western countries, the expansion of higher education occurred in Israel as well, and processes commercialization have sprouted in Israel at the beginning of the 1990s, expanding the weight of the private sector and reducing the level of involvement of the government (Menachem et al., 2008).

I.3.2. Teacher Education Models in Israel

For years, the leading universities in Israel have managed to maintain their elitist position, leaving teacher education colleges with the mission to promote professional teachers. Following a report published by the parliamentary committee for teachers' status in 1979, which offered a bachelor of education degree, B.Ed, instead of a B.A., the desired breakthrough towards academization of teachers' training occurred.

Consequently, colleges were requested to apply the adaptations required by the CHE, such as expanding disciplinary knowledge, updating admission terms, and demanding higher profile of academic staff in colleges. This step brought about a significant change and an important means to promote and enhance the teaching profession (Ariav & Seidenberg, 1995).

One of the largest challenges in teachers' training today, is to integrate, alongside the disciplinary curriculum, processes aimed at formulating an educational worldview, which will assist teachers in devising their concepts of discourse, outline their patterns of action in the educational field, and escort their professional life and their influential abilities (Weinberger, 2016).

I.3.3. The Kibbutzim College of Education

The Kibbutzim College is the largest academic teachers' college in Israel, with over 6,000 students each year, studying in a variety of programs in the field of education: B.Ed and M.Ed degrees, teaching certificate programs, and various professional training programs and continuing education courses.

The institutional goal of Kibbutzim College is to train broad-minded, values-oriented, and influential educators, who will be able to bring meaningful innovative projects and reforms into the Israeli education system. The College believes in combining creativity and quality with values of tolerance and respect.

The training process provides advanced knowledge in education and teaching methods in the various disciplines, along with practical experience in schools and kindergartens. Within the training process, there is a broad emphasis on the skills that must be acquired in order to become high quality teachers.

I.4. Characteristics of Students Studying in Higher Education

Similar to the Western world, higher education in Israel has moved from a highly selective to a mass educational system. This transition have brought new crowds to universities and colleges and generated, along with the student-as-customer equation, significant changes in the characteristics of higher education students (Volansky, 2005).

As the majority of college students nowadays belong to generations Y and Z, the focus is on the characteristics of these two groups, in an attempt to specify the dominant features relevant to educational affairs.

Perceptual gaps have begun to pop up because of the clash between the conventions and regulations of higher education institutions and the distinctive expectations of Generation Y and Z students. In an effort to meet the needs of Generation Y and Z students, higher education institutions abandoned the formal approach, and adopted and strengthened the informal and personal approach (Almog & Almog, 2016).

I.4.1. Students' Academic Achievements in Higher Education

Students' perceptions of their academic success are deeply dependent on the beliefs they hold as to their ability to perform according to requested standards, in terms of their level of competence, emotional status, and motivational factors. The research regarding academic achievements deals with students' perceptions of their academic success, and relates to the factors that predict academic achievements and academic success.

Bandura (1997) defined the term self-efficacy as the core belief that sets the foundation of human motivation, performance accomplishments, and emotional well-being. In the academic arena, the theory of self-efficacy was proven a dominant predictor for success, and was demonstrated in a set of studies.

Another predictor of academic achievements is the self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2008), a theory of human motivation, development, and wellness. According to the theory, the term well-being is divided into two main aspects: psychological well-being, which deals with human potential, internal motivations, and meaning, and subjective well-being, which focuses on the idea of happiness and satisfaction that arises from personal experience, attitudes and feelings, while focusing on positive feelings. The notion of positive feelings was strengthened by the establishment of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Positive psychology facilitates happiness, empowers the effects of autonomy and self-regulation, affects health, constitutes insights, and allows talent and creativity.

The control-value theory (Pekrun et al., 2006) provides a theoretical framework for emotions and achievement emotions in education. The control-value theory implies that adequately shaping educational environments can help in developing achievement emotions, preventing maladaptive emotions, and help using emotions in productive and healthy ways (Pekrun et al., 2007).

A third predictor of academic achievement was detected based on the social identity theory, which was offered by Tajfel and Turner (1985). This theory suggests that social psychological processes are grounded in an individual understanding and engagement within the social context. This idea was strengthened by Ryan and Shin (2011), who pointed out that students' ability to make use of the social surroundings and to be able to get help in order to cope with difficulties.

Students' academic achievements are undoubtedly influenced by a range of indicators, however, the commitment of the higher education institution is to be conscious of these indicators, to facilitate the educational surroundings, and offer students appropriate emotional and social support to enhance their self-efficacy and empower them, and thus help them to improve their academic achievements.

1.5. The Role and Characteristics of Academic and Administrative Staff

The role of employees in service delivery is critical for customers' perceptions of service quality. Frontline employees are of the greatest significance since they are in direct contact with customers (Arslanagic-Kalajdzic et al., 2014).

The role of academic staff in higher education institutions is to convey to students the required knowledge, in accordance with their study track, and the definition or purpose of studies. Academic staff have a duty to deliver theoretical and practical knowledge and should aspire to expose students to new disciplinary knowledge and proficiencies and consequently, to convey deep insights.

The role of Administrative staff's is to support the academic staff in their tasks of research and teaching, and to support and enhance students' experiences (Robson, 2000). Administrative departments in higher education institutions are broad and diverse, including operation, learning resources and learning aids, technology and information systems, finance and faculty administration.

Faculty administration is responsible for delivering services from the candidate stage and up to graduation. These services include the provision of up-to-date information, counseling and ongoing response to students' requests, enhancement of the accessibility to curriculum and studying schedule, management of accreditation issues, coordination of meetings with academics, updating current and future students' activities, and linking students to a relevant entity for their request.

Students' expectations concerning the service they receive are directed equally at the academic and administrative staff of the higher education institution they attend. The distinction between the two service providers is that students interact with the academic staff within a limited period, whereas administrative staff is accessible for students throughout their entire degree, in a variety of aspects concerning their studies, and concerning additional diverse issues.

As regularity of communications with the administrative staff is high and more unmediated, administrative staff often move beyond the processes of mere service-providers and incorporates a mentor role into their processes (Pitman, 2000), allowing for students a quiet and safe spot. Nevertheless, this unique relationship should be constantly kept from breaking boundaries, as administrative staff acknowledges the fact that they are subordinated to academic and institutional regulations.

Fernandes and colleagues (2013) showed that students' satisfaction could be attributed to the quality of lecturers' teaching, as well as the quality of human elements of administrative staff.

Given this setting, an important role is designated to the professionalism, efficiency, and humanity of the administrative staff, as well as to their ability to listen and empathize, and their willingness to help students in their application.

I.6. Perceptions of Service Quality

In an era of intense commercial competition, and a growing awareness of consumers, an organization's ability to deliver a high quality of service, in an attempt to increase customers' satisfaction, is of utmost importance.

Customers' satisfaction, the key concept of this process, is the outcome of two prominent components: service quality and customer value. Customer value refers to the trade-off between the benefits and the sacrifices for a customer in a purchase context (Parasuraman, 1997; Woodruff, 1997). Service quality is defined as the customer's judgment about an entity's overall excellence or superiority (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Service quality in the educational sector is considered a complex and multifaceted concept, and therefore lacks a single definition of quality (Harvey & Green, 1993). Consequently, there has been a lack of consensus over the best way to define and measure service quality (Clewes, 2010). Students' satisfaction was defined by Elliott and Shin (2002) as the students' personal evaluation of the various consequences and experiences associated with education. An additional definition was offered by Gordon and Partington (1993), who stated that educational quality lies in the success with which a higher education institution provides educational surroundings that support students effectively in achieving learning goals and academic standards.

Educational institutions have long considered themselves detached from the commercial equation, due to the unique nature of higher education as merchandise. However, free market activities, along with alterations in national policies concerning higher education, have forced stakeholders towards serious consideration and proactive thinking in delivering the goods. The increasing number of students presented new challenges for higher education institutions and brought about operational implications. These challenges are manifested in relation to the quality of teaching and learning, but also in the quality of student services (Giannakis & Bullivant, 2016). It further emphasizes the need to focus on students as customers and on applying marketing theories to the higher education context (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

1.6.1. Perceptual Gaps between Service Providers and Service Recipients

The results of a study conducted by Harvey and Williams (2010) concerning student and teaching staff perceptions of the factors establishing higher education quality provision, revealed gaps in perceptions.

The service quality model (Parasuraman et al., 1988) specifies that customers' quality perceptions are influenced mainly by five gaps:

1. Customer expectations and management's perceptions of customer expectations
2. Management's perception of customers' expectations and service quality standards.
3. Service quality standards and the actual service delivered.
4. Delivery and communication regarding the service to customers.
5. Difference between customers' expectations and perceptions.

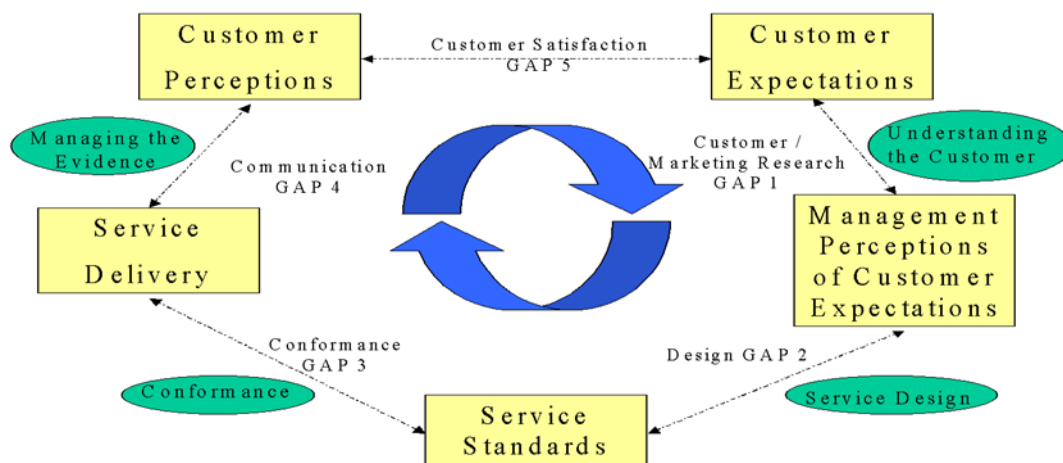


Figure 1.2.: *Service gap model (Parasuraman et al. 1988).*

According to Rowley (1997), the most important gap to be managed is between customer's expectation of service and of the service actually delivered.

In the field of education, categorizing and measuring the actual quality of service delivered to students, as well as identifying the existing gaps, is essential when dealing with quality service issues.

Additionally, there is a need to maximize efforts to improve the quality of services (Teeroovengadam et al., 2016) and maximal attention to service distinctive dimensions should be paid (Helgesen & Nettet, 2007).

I.6.2. Service Quality Dimensions in Higher Education

Students' experience is commonly the sum of two leading categories: teaching and learning, and total student experience. Total student experience includes: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, empathy/attitude, assurance, reputation and credibility, professionalism and skill, competence, faculty research and content, student educational experiences and outcomes, access, communication, systems, fairness, class size, curriculum load and difficulty levels. The results of the research by Nell and Cant (2014) suggest that the ability of the student administration division to perform the service dependably, accurately and on time is the most important feature when it comes to service quality.

Developing an adequate model for measuring service quality in higher education is challenging because of its multidimensional nature. The SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al. 1988) is the best known and most frequently used scale measuring service quality in a wide variety of service surroundings, including the educational field. The SERVQUAL model includes five dimensions:

Tangibles: Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel.

Reliability: Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.

Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.

Assurance: Knowledge, courtesy, and the ability to inspire trust and confidence.

Empathy: Caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers.

The SERVQUAL instrument was found to best represent the most significant dimensions of administrative staff in higher education.

I.7. Expectations and Perceptions Management by way of Service Contract

In the commercial arena, organizations that managed to build trust among customers and initiate and deliver a positive service experience, may create a considerable competitive advantage for themselves.

Among the chief tools adapted in recent years, in order to build trust between organizations and customers, and to enhance service quality, stands an organizational service contract. Via implementation of a service contract, the organization creates transparency and makes a commitment to its customers regarding the content and scope of services, the terms and levels of service provision. By doing so, the organization coordinates expectations, and nurtures a relationship of trust with its customers.

In the context of higher education, transparency provides information on relevant characteristics and performance of the educational services (Hladchenko, 2015). The service contract has to reflect both sides of the equation, students and administrators, in order to be effective and build trust (Rowley, 1997).

I.8. Conceptual Framework

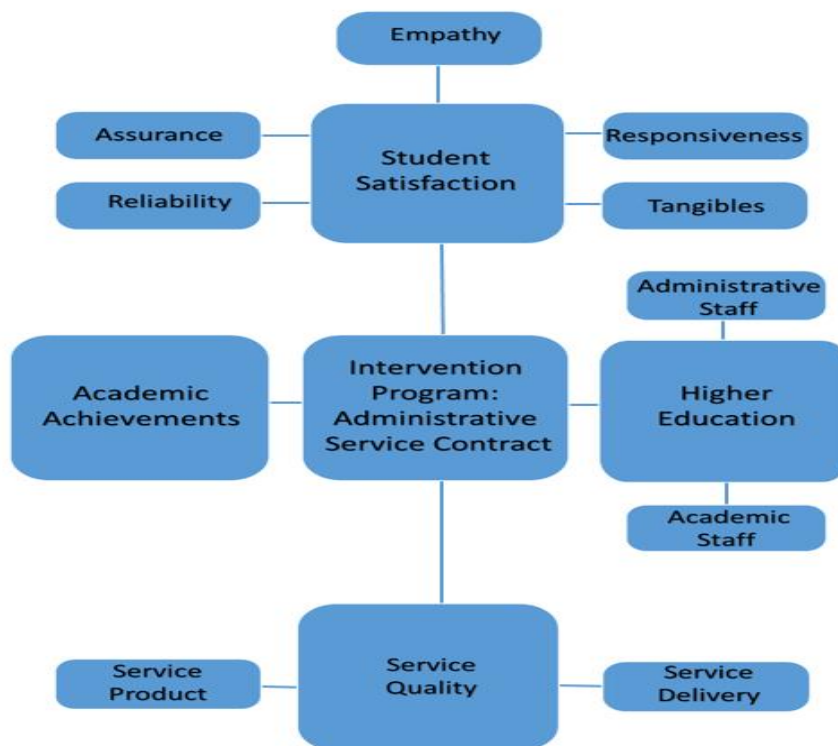


Figure I.3. *Conceptual framework of the research*

Chapter II: Methodology

II.1. Research Aims

1. To explore how the implementation of an intervention program, aimed at developing an administrative service contract, will cultivate secretaries' skills in providing quality service.
2. To expose the differences in perceptions between students and administrative staff, pre- and post-intervention, in relation to the quality of administrative service.
3. To examine students' perceptions regarding the relationship between their satisfaction from the administrative service and their academic achievements.

II.2. Research Questions

1. How will the implementation of an intervention program, aimed at developing an administrative service contract, cultivate secretaries' skills in providing quality service, in relation to tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy?
2. What is the difference in perceptions between students and administrative staff, pre- and post-intervention, in relation to the quality of service provided by the administrative staff?
3. What are the students' perceptions regarding the relationship between their satisfaction from the administrative service and their academic achievements?

II.3. Research Hypotheses and Variables

Hypothesis 1: The implementation of an intervention program, aimed at developing an administrative service contract, will cultivate secretaries' skills in providing quality service, in relation to tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

Variables related to hypothesis 1:

Dependent variable: Secretaries' skills: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy in providing administrative service quality

Independent variable: Intervention program aimed at developing an administrative service contract.

Moderator variables: Program of study, age, gender.

Hypothesis 2: Difference in perceptions between students and administrative staff will be found pre-and post-intervention, in relation to the quality of administrative service: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

Variables related to hypothesis 2:

Dependent variable: Students' and secretaries' perceptions in relation to the quality of administrative service: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

Independent variable: Intervention program aimed at developing an administrative service contract.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a strong positive correlation between students' satisfaction from administrative service and their academic achievements.

Variables related to hypothesis 3:

Dependent variable: Students' academic achievements

Independent variable: Students' satisfaction from administrative service

II.4. Research Approach

Research approach is a mixed methods experimental design involves the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, and the integration of the information within an experimental design. The design is an explanatory sequential design, through which quantitative data is collected and analyzed in the first phase and qualitative data is added in order to refine, extend, or provide detailed explanation.

II.5. Research Stages

Stage	Paradigm	Aim	Research Methods	Research Instrument	Research Population	Data Analysis
1.Pre-Experimental Stage	Quantitative paradigm experimental design	-To explore the relations between quality service provided by administrative staff and student satisfaction with their studies in the academic institution.	Survey	SERVQUAL Questionnaire (Parasuraman et al., 1988) (See Appendix 1)	500 students 22 secretaries	Statistics

		-To expose the different perceptions between students and administrative staff concerning the quality of administrative service				
	Qualitative paradigm narrative research	To expose the different perceptions between students and administrative staff concerning the quality of administrative service	Semi-structured interview	Original interview guide (See Appendix 2)	12 students	Content analysis
<p>1. Experimental Intervention Stage - The aim of the experimental stage was to improve secretaries' skills in providing quality service. The intervention consisted of 10 meetings with 22 secretaries from three faculties, which concluded in the formation of an administrative service contract</p>						
3.Post-Experimental Stage	Quantitative paradigm experimental design	To explore the relations between quality service provided by administrative staff and student satisfaction with their studies in the academic institution. - To examine students' perceptions regarding the relationship between levels of satisfaction and academic achievements	Survey	SERVQUAL Questionnaire (Parasuraman et al., 1988) (See Appendix 1)	500 Students 22 secretaries	Statistics
	Qualitative paradigm narrative research	-To broaden the understanding of the quantitative data	Focus group discussions	Original set of questions for discussion	3 secretaries	Content analysis

		collected and to gather additional information regarding administrative service quality - To expose the different perceptions between students and administrative staff concerning the quality of administrative service		(See Appendix 3)		
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II.6. Research Population and Sampling Methods

The research population included a sample of approximately 500 students from three faculties: Education, Humanities, and Sciences, who study at Kibbutzim College of Education in the Bachelor's and Master's degree programs, and teaching certificate programs. The research population was selected in line with the number of students studying in each program, assuring that the sample will best represent the variety of students. Students were sampled according to cluster sampling (Beyth-Marom, 2009). Twelve students, sampled in purposive sample, from three faculties and from the different programs, took part in the interviews.

In addition, 22 academic secretaries from three faculties (Education, Sciences, and Humanities) participated in the research.

II.7. Research Instruments

The SERVQUAL questionnaire was used to measure service quality perceptions. The instrument was developed by Parasuraman and colleagues in 1988, and was reassessed and refined by Parasuraman et al. in 1991. The SERVQUAL questionnaire consists of a 22-item scale, grouped into five dimensions: tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

Factor analysis of the five variables of SERVQUAL instrument have raised the following Cronbach's alpha reliability statistics: Tangibles=0.61, Reliability=0.91, Responsiveness=0.84, Assurance=0.90, Empathy=0.87.

Additionally, three items representing students' satisfaction and students' academic achievements were used in order to gather the students' perceptions of the correlation between satisfaction from administrative service and academic achievements. Reliability for the items was Cronbach's alpha=0.698.

The original semi-structured interview guide was developed in order to collect qualitative data from students.

The original set of questions was developed for a focus group discussion, in order to gather information from the secretaries regarding their perceptions of the services they provide to students.

II.8. Data Analysis Methods

Statistical methods: T-test was used to analyze gender and age differences and the difference in the perceptions of students and secretaries. The one-way ANOVA (F-test) was used to analyze the different perceptions of students from different programs. Correlation and linear regression were used to examine the correlation between students' satisfaction and their academic achievements.

Content analysis: a thematic analysis was employed, qualifying the development of codes and themes according to strategies of the narrative research.

II.9. Ethical Considerations

Students were acquainted with the research topic, outlines, and aims. They were informed that questionnaires and interviews are anonymous, non-offensive, respectful of multicultural populations, and free to choose if they want to participate in the research.

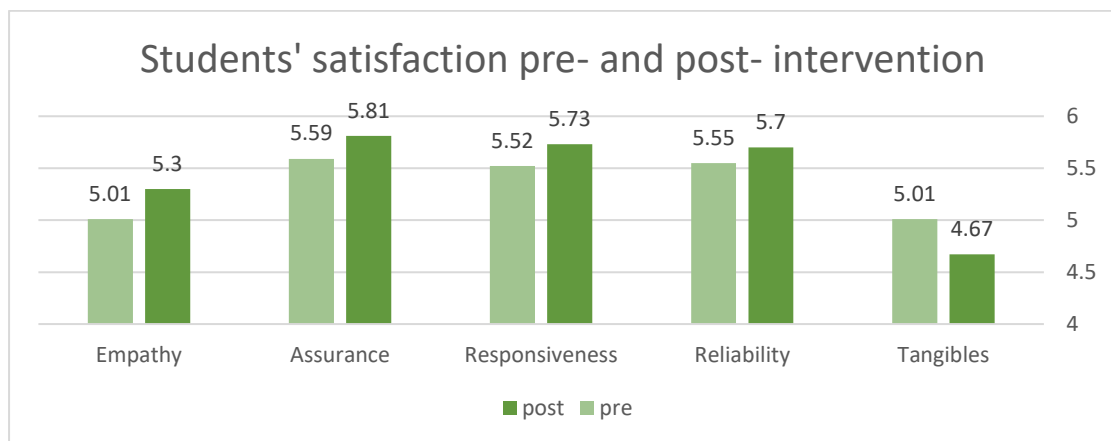
Administrative staff-researcher relations (researcher is positioned as head of administration of the faculty of education) was treated via neutral assistance in transferring questionnaires in the faculty of education. Lastly, student-researcher relations was treated via neutral assistance for the operational stages of the research.

Chapter III: Findings

III.1. **Findings emerging from research question 1:** How will the implementation of an intervention program, aimed at developing an administrative service contract, cultivate secretaries' skills in providing quality service, in relation to tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy?

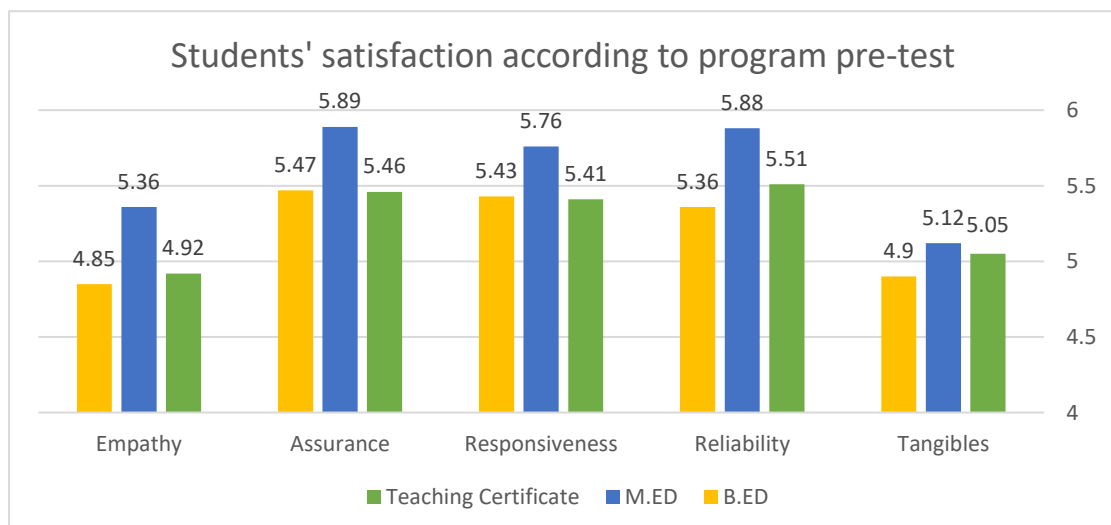
Hypothesis 1: The implementation of an intervention program, aimed at developing an administrative service contract, will cultivate secretaries' skills in providing quality service, in relation to tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

Figure. III. 1. *Students' satisfaction pre- and post- intervention.*



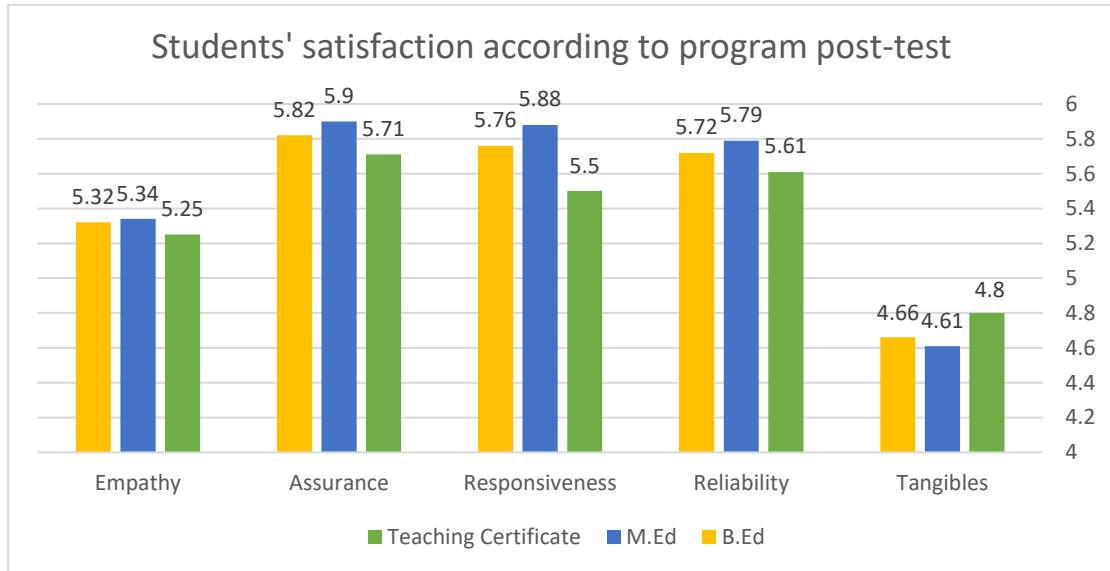
The implementation of an intervention program, have cultivated secretaries' skills in relation to three service variables: responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

Figure III.2. *Students' satisfaction according to program pre-test.*



Differences in students' satisfaction regarding administrative service quality were found between students from different programs of study in the pre-test examination of four variables: Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. Students in the Master degree programs were significantly higher than the other groups in their level of satisfaction.

Figure III.3. *Students' satisfaction according to program post-test.*



No significant differences were found in students' post-test satisfaction regarding administrative service quality between students from different programs of study.

Figure. III.4. *B.Ed students' pre- and post-intervention satisfaction levels.*

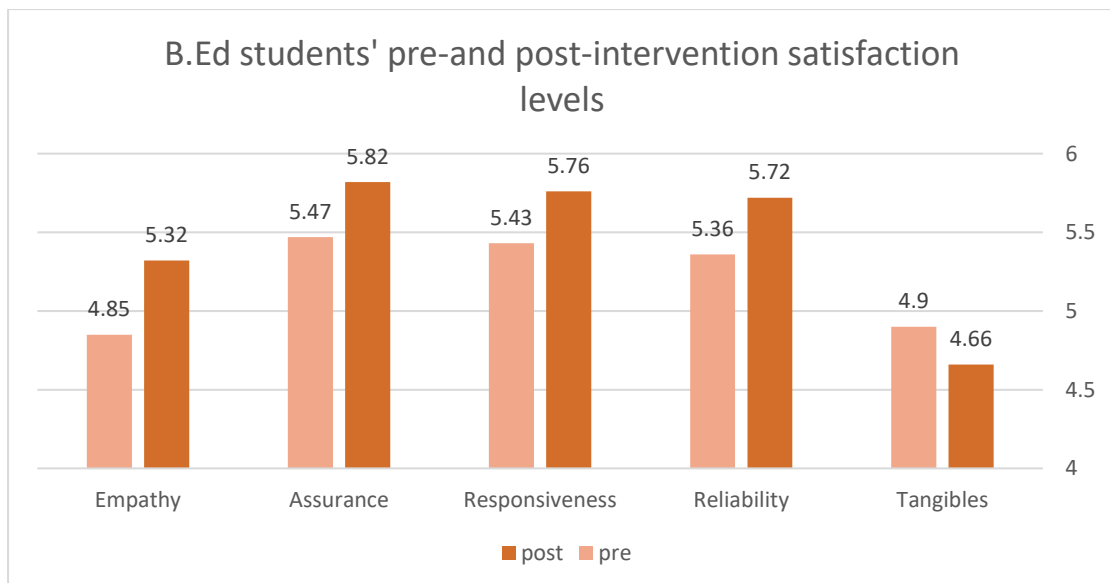


Figure. III.5. *M.Ed students' pre- and post-intervention satisfaction levels.*

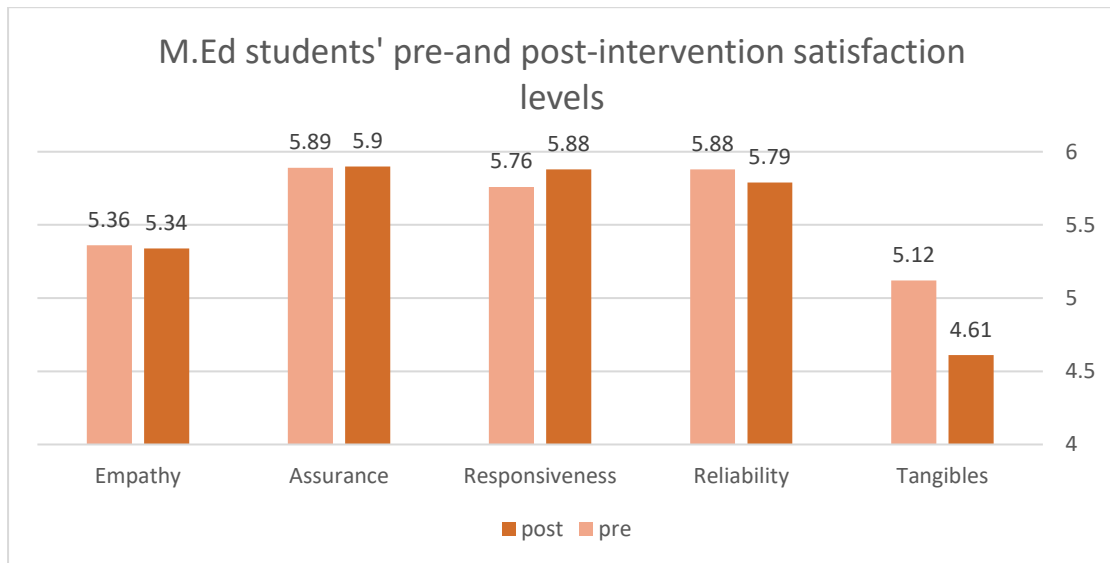
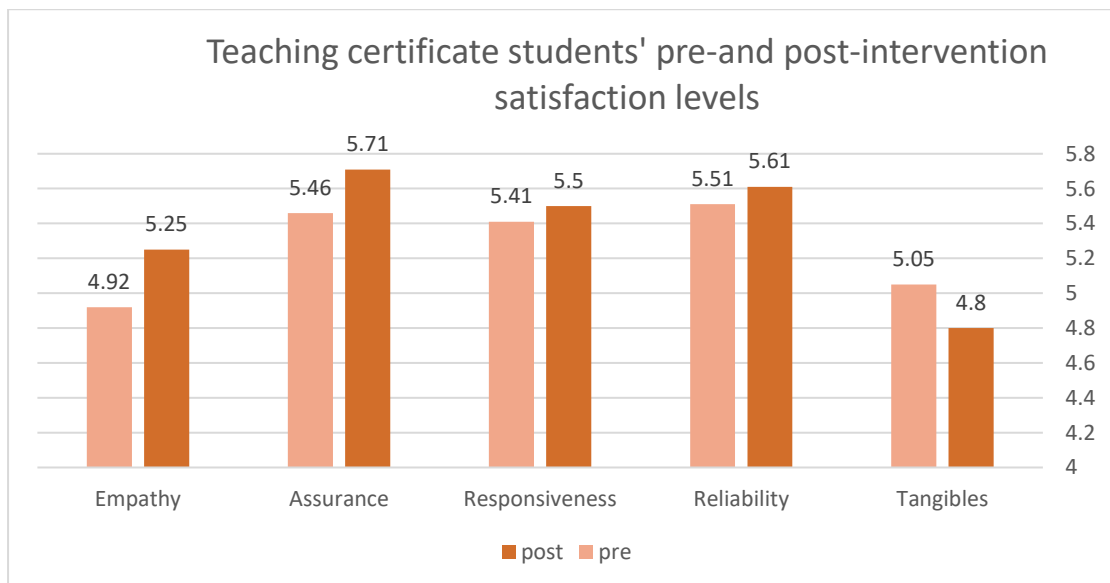


Figure III.6. *Teaching certificate students' pre-and post-intervention satisfaction levels*



Results showed a significant change from pre-intervention to post-intervention in B.Ed students' satisfaction with service quality, indicating that the implementation of an intervention program cultivated secretaries' skills in providing quality service in relation to four service variables: Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. In contrast, no significant change from pre-intervention to post-intervention was evident in reported satisfaction with service quality by M.Ed. students or teaching certificate students.

Figure III.7. Male students' satisfaction pre- and post-intervention.

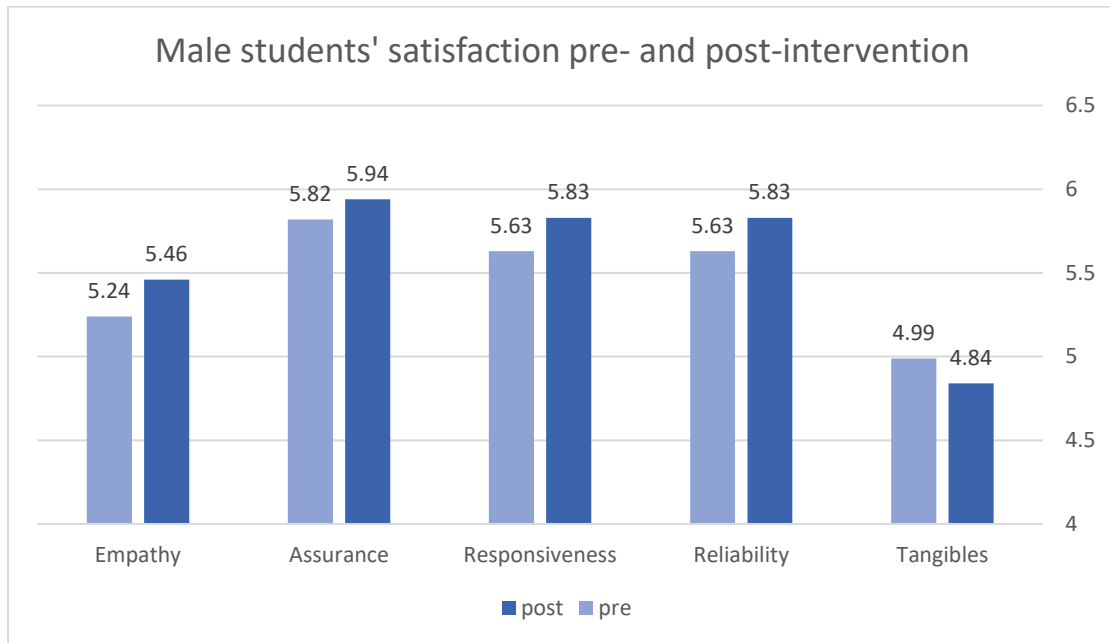
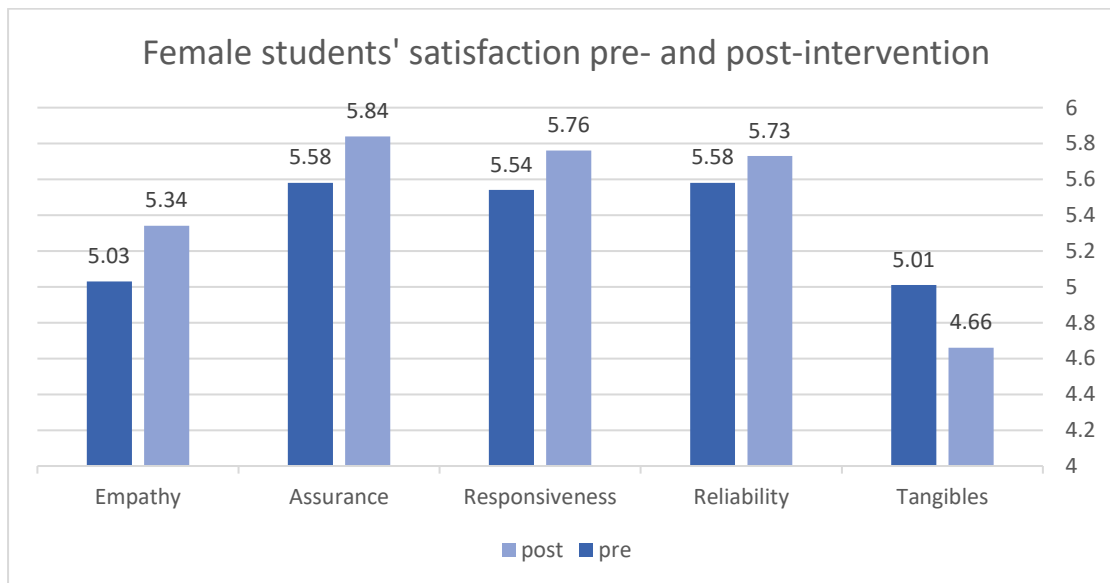


Figure III .8. Female students' satisfaction pre- and post-intervention.



Results showed a significant change from pre-intervention to post-intervention in female students' satisfaction with service quality, indicating that the implementation of an intervention program cultivated secretaries' skills regarding three variables: Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy.

In contrast, no significant change from pre-intervention to post-intervention was evident in satisfaction with service quality by male students.

Figure III .9.Pre- and post-intervention satisfaction of students under 30-years-old.

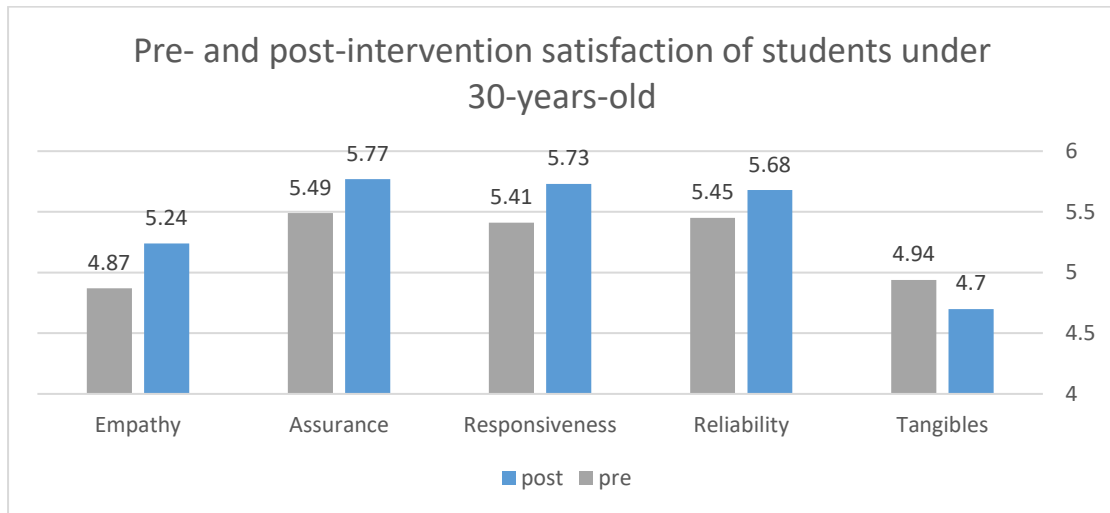
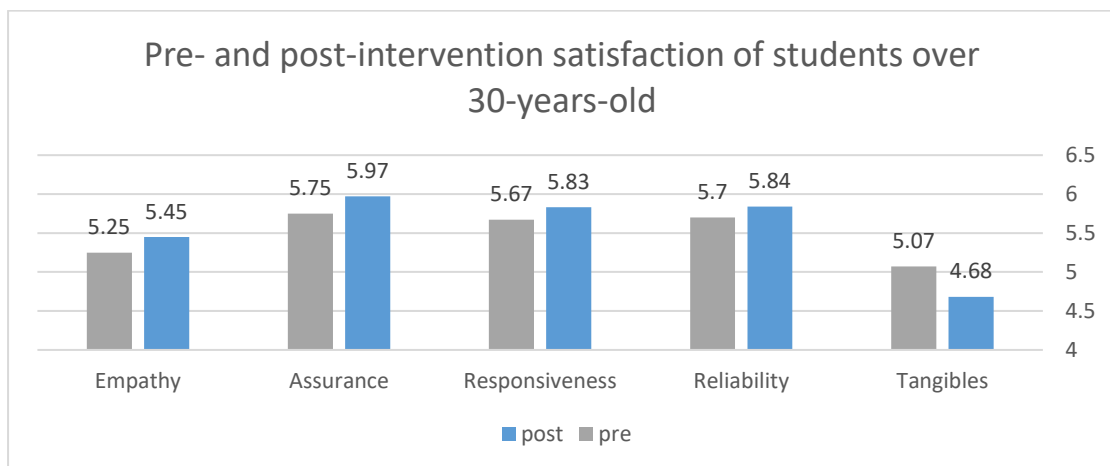


Figure. III .10.Pre- and post-intervention satisfaction of students over 30-years-old.



Results showed a significant change from pre-intervention to post-intervention in satisfaction of students under 30-years-old with service quality, indicating that the implementation of an intervention program cultivated secretaries' skills in providing quality service regarding four variables: Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. In contrast, no significant change from pre-intervention to post-intervention was evident in satisfaction with service quality by students over 30-years-old.

Integrative finding relating to research question 1 and to hypothesis 1:

Based on the above results showing students' increased satisfaction after the intervention, it appears that the implementation of an intervention program cultivated secretaries' skills in relation to three service variables: responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

III.2. Findings emerging from research question 2: What is the difference in perceptions between students and administrative staff, pre- and post-intervention, in relation to the quality of service provided by the administrative staff?

Hypothesis 2: Difference in perceptions between students and administrative staff will be found pre- and post-intervention in relation to the quality of administrative service: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy.

Figure III.11. *Students' and secretaries' satisfaction pre-test.*

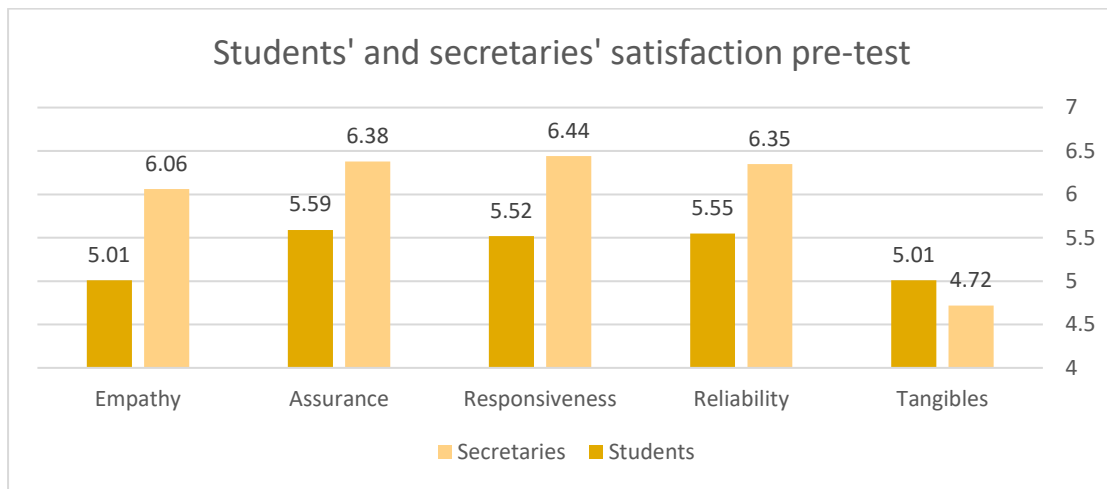
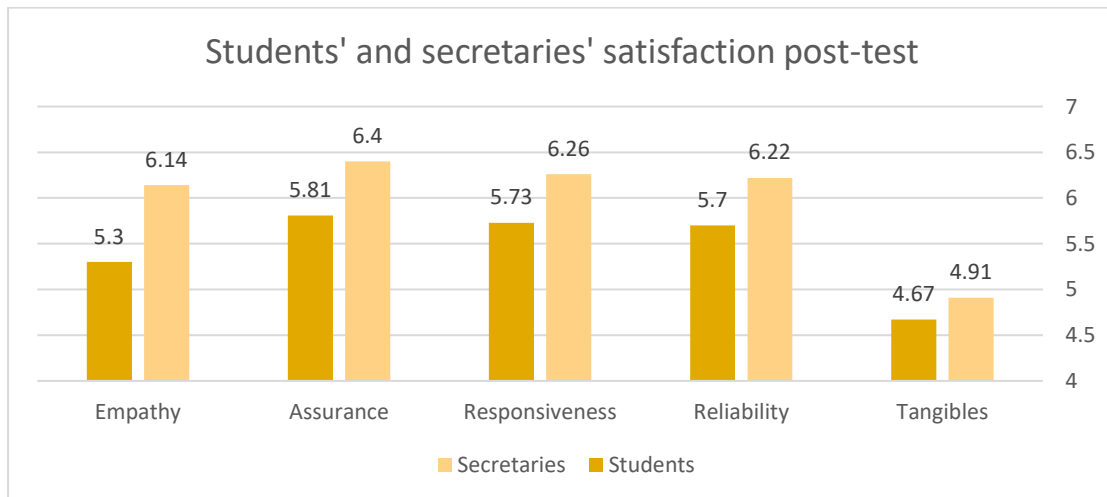


Figure III .12. *Students' and secretaries' satisfaction post-test.*



Significant differences between students and secretaries concerning the quality of administrative service were found in the pre-test and post-test examinations regarding four variables: Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. Secretaries reported significantly higher levels of satisfaction than students did on all four variables.

Qualitative findings relating to research question 2 and hypothesis 2:

The findings exposed that in some categories, students and secretaries saw things in a similar way and in some categories, there were inconsistencies, or associated issues were raised. Therefore, qualitative findings partially support the hypothesis that perceptual gaps will be found between students and secretaries.

III.3. Findings emerging from research question 3: What are the students' perceptions regarding the relationship between their satisfaction from the administrative service and their academic achievements?

Hypothesis 3: There will be a strong positive correlation between students' satisfaction from administrative service and their academic achievements.

Table III.1. *Correlation between Students' Satisfaction and Academic Achievements.*

The entire sample		Achievements	Satisfaction
Achievements	Pearson Correlation	1	.320**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	356	356
Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.320**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	356	381

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

A medium positive correlation is demonstrated between students' satisfaction and their academic achievements (according to students' report of their academic achievements).

Table III.2. *Correlation between Students' Satisfaction and Academic Achievements According to Program of Study.*

Program	Variable	1	2
B.Ed. (N=186)	1. Achievement	–	.277***
	2. Satisfaction	.277***	–
M.Ed. (N=89)	1. Achievement	–	.278**

	2. Satisfaction	.278**	–
Teaching certificate	1. Achievement	–	.413***
	2. Satisfaction	.413***	–

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

There is a medium positive correlation between B.Ed and M.Ed students' satisfaction and their academic achievements, and a strong positive correlation between teaching certificate students' satisfaction and their academic achievements (according to students' report of their academic achievements).

Table III.3. *Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Students' Academic Achievements.*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
		<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
1	(Constant)	1.203	.221		5.447	.000
	Tangibles	.023	.034	.023	.668	.505
	Reliability	.055	.055	.055	.993	.321
	Responsiveness	-.102	.054	-.105	-1.872	.062
	Assurance	-.075	.064	-.077	-1.183	.238
	Empathy	.228	.050	.255	4.567	.000
	Gender	.015	.082	.005	.178	.859
	Age	.057	.096	.025	.592	.554
	Program_1	-.144	.099	-.066	-1.458	.146
	Program_2	-.354	.096	-.136	-3.674	.000
	Satisfaction	.625	.036	.719	17.126	.000

According to the regression model, satisfaction, empathy and study program predict, in descending order, students' academic achievements (according to students' report of their achievements).

Qualitative findings relating to research question 3 and hypothesis 3:

Findings from the secretaries' focus group discussion exposed that voices were not unanimous, even though for most part they tended to agree that students' academic achievements might be affected by levels of satisfaction. Research hypothesis 3 is therefore partially confirmed according to the qualitative findings.

Chapter IV: Conclusions and Recommendations

VI.1. Factual conclusions relating to research question 1: How will the implementation of an intervention program, aimed at developing an administrative service contract, cultivate secretaries' skills in providing quality service, in relation to tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy?

Hypothesis 1: The implementation of an intervention program, aimed at developing an administrative service contract, will cultivate secretaries' skills in providing quality service, in relation to tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

The conclusion arising from the discussion is that service quality of administrative staff in higher education is highly associated with the ability of the staff to enhance their professional competences. These competences include the establishment of transparency in relation to the services delivered to students, as well as the aptitude to shape a relationship built on trust and appreciation with the students.

The ability to enhance competences is further linked to the skills of the staff to accommodate the specific features and necessities of the various groups of students, as they emerge from the study. This ability is further expressed by the talent of staff to distinguish between students who study in the different programs, and to be aware of the variety of expectations in terms of gender and age differences. The precise identification of the characteristics of each group enables the provision of a service tailored to each student's needs.

Hence, the service provider's understanding of the service recipient's needs, the ability to assimilate this understanding through the improvement of their professional skills and a transparent provision of the service, and the capability to provide a tailor-made service to each student, is of fundamental importance in promoting service quality and enhancing students' satisfaction.

VI.2. Factual conclusions relating to research question 2: What is the difference in perceptions between students and administrative staff, pre- and post-intervention, in relation to the quality of service provided by the administrative staff?

Hypothesis 2: Different perceptions will be found between students and administrative staff, pre- and post-intervention, in relation to the quality of service provided by the administrative staff.

The conclusion arising from the discussion is that by students and staff perceive the service quality of administrative staff in higher education is perceived in different ways. These differences are attributed to the diverse viewpoint, interests, beliefs between students and staff, to the contribution of students to the service action, and to personal and intergenerational difference between secretaries and students.

The differences in perceptions can be bridged via the creation of transparency in the administrative services, and through the sincere personal connection and the empathic provision of service. These can infuse the students with feelings of understanding and trust, and increase their satisfaction.

The findings thus show that there are built-in differences in students' and secretaries' service perceptions, while the ability to bridge the differences and to bring about high satisfaction lies in the perceptual rapprochement between students and secretaries.

VI.3. Factual conclusions relating to research question 3: What are the students' perceptions regarding the relationship between their satisfaction from the administrative service and their academic achievements?

Hypothesis 3: There will be a strong positive correlation between students' satisfaction from administrative service and their academic achievements.

The conclusion arising from the discussion is that service quality of administrative staff in higher education, which is associated with students' satisfaction of service quality, is correlated to high academic achievements.

In this sense, the satisfaction achieved through the improvement of the administrative service can lead to a further improvement of students' academic achievements.

VI.4. Conceptual conclusions: remodeling quality service of administrative staff in higher education: the SQUAD-HEI model

The conceptual conclusions that emerge from the research converge into an integrative model that represents the original tenets of the study. The model further constitutes a potential pattern, which may be offered to managers and policy makers in the academy.

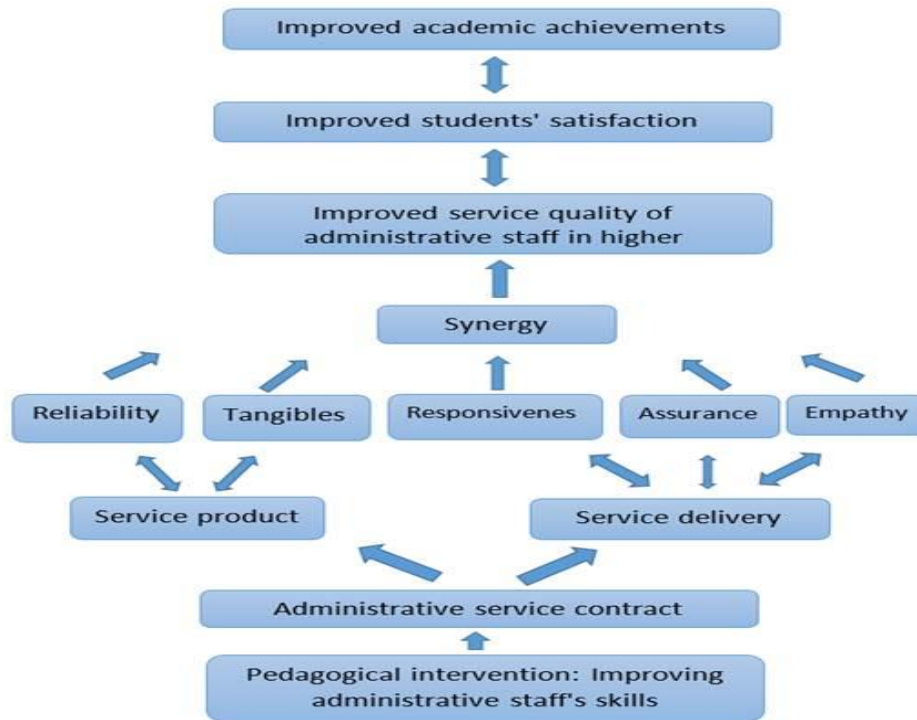


Figure VI.1. *The evidence-based SQUAD-HEI model*

VI.5. Practical implementations and recommendations

It is recommended that the College establish a system of personal development, professional training and supervision, and ongoing control, which will facilitate treatment of issues related to service quality. These recommendations include:

1. Cultivate employees' sense of well-being, and enhance their identification with the vision and goals of the organization.
2. Open professional frameworks for administrative staff in order to improve their service skills.
3. Generate a control system that checks the relevance and efficiency of the service components and produce updates accordingly.
4. Set regular meetings with academic and administrative heads of units, with a view to producing intra-college collaborations and tightening interfaces related to the flow and quality of service.

VI.6. Contribution to theoretical knowledge

The theoretical basis of the model is drawn from humanistic theories, and from transformative management (Bass, 1985) and educational leadership theories, in particular, servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). It relies on newer theories regarding the caring and empathic professions (Noddings, 2002), which correspondingly dictate the humanistic vision of Kibbutzim College and constitutes the ideological platform of the research.

The theoretical grounds of the new model are reinforced by the insights that emerge from the study findings, specifically, the wide-ranging importance of transparency of services, and the considerable significance of personal and empathic relationships in building trust and appreciation, and in improving students' satisfaction

VI.7. Contribution to practical knowledge

The new model advances a new theory that deals with the management of quality service of administrative staff in higher education. Further, the thorough work and the innovative research in this field are in themselves a breakthrough in the administrative field in higher education institutions, as very few studies, if any, zoomed in so methodically and comprehensively on the administrative work in higher education.

As higher education institutions have generally similar administrative elements, it will be easy to turn this model, with minor adaptations, into a model that will help institutions worldwide to improve service quality and increase students' satisfaction.

VI.8. Research limitations

The researcher's position as the head of administration of the faculty presents a limitation since it may instigate a tendency among students, and especially among secretaries, for social desirability. Moreover, the researcher's position as an involved researcher may produce inherent research biases during interviews. In an attempt to reduce the weight of the biases, the researcher was supported by neutral assistants in the distribution and collection of questionnaires.

Additionally, the internal validity of the findings may be impaired due to a statistical interaction with selection of the different maturation of participants during

the time that passed, as well as due to inherent differences within the selection of students studying in the various programs.

Furthermore, the experimental environment may threaten the external validity of the research, and the ability to generalize its results, which was geographically, culturally and perceptually limited. At the same time, in view of the large number of participants, the diversity of the sample and the triangulation that was employed to strengthen the findings, generalizability of the findings may be claimed.

VI.9. Future research

It is recommended that researchers conduct a longitudinal study that will examine the impact of a service contract over time and during different stages. It is further recommended to perform the examination by segmenting the students according to the program of study, as the different features of each program might dictate different contractual engagement.

It is recommended that research that will examine the impact of the combination of administrative service and academic service be conducted, in order to accurately distinguish between the different natures of services and hence, try to produce adjusted solutions.

It is recommended that the relationship between students' satisfaction and their academic achievements be examined in a study that empirically evaluates students' achievements and not the perceptions of their academic achievements.

It is worth examining the contribution of the managerial agenda of administrators in higher education to the quality of service provided to students.

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